

NERO ACES bridge

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Degree and Career Exploration and Planning

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View from the Chief's Desk

From the time we are small, parents, relatives and friends ask us what we want to be when we grow up. I can recall being asked as early as five years old, and of course at that age, life is too new and confusing to make such an important decision. I must have changed my mind at least twenty times before I turned eighteen and started seriously considering what my major would be in college.

Our career choices are driven by our likes and dislikes, our interests and hobbies, our abilities, the types of people we most like to spend time with or not, whether we want to go to college and for how long, and how much money we want to spend on college and to earn in our chosen profession. Sometimes it is mind-boggling trying to put it all together and come up with the right fit.

In the past our career choices were also dictated by the types of degrees that were offered in the local area, unless we were fortunate enough to have parents who could afford to send us away to college. Since the advent of the Internet, we have a multitude of degree selections available to us from schools and colleges with varying delivery methods throughout the world. We can choose to attend technical schools for trades, academic institutions of higher learning, colleges with traditional classroom delivery, others with one-on-one mentoring, instruction via the Internet, or a mixture of delivery methods. We now have the ability choose which college or school offers our chosen degree with the best delivery method to fit our current lifestyle. For service

members who move every three years and often have sporadic work schedules, this type of flexibility is priceless.

In addition, we must be wise enough to research colleges thoroughly to avoid degree mills, while also trying to understand the differences among various accrediting bodies and agencies. Beware of colleges that promise a degree in return for money and very little effort on your part. More than likely, these colleges are degree mills, and the degree you receive will not be recognized by employers. When researching colleges, always ask for the name of the accrediting body or agency for your chosen degree plan and college. Colleges that are accredited by nationally or regionally accredited agencies are recognized as valid for Federal employment and are most likely to be recognized by other employers. Colleges that are members of the Servicemember's Opportunity College Army Degree (SOCAD) program guarantee transfer of college credit to other college members. For more information on the SOCAD program, go to www.nereducation.army.mil, and select SOCAD under College Programs on the left-side menu. Or you may visit your local Education Center and speak directly with an Army counselor.



WHAT CAN I DO WITH A MAJOR IN...?
<http://www.uwec.edu/career/Links/wcidwami.htm>

Carla Ortiz
NERO ACES Team Chief

Four Easy Steps

By: Carla Ortiz

A few simple steps to creating a career and degree plan designed just for you!

(1) **Get to know yourself and determine the career that best fits you.** If you are having trouble making a career decision, several tests are available through your local education center to help you make a decision on the best career field for you. If after taking these tests you still find that you cannot make a firm career decision, you can begin taking general courses in college until you decide. New college students must consult with an Army counselor before taking college classes. Please visit your local education center or sign up online at www.nereducation.army.mil.

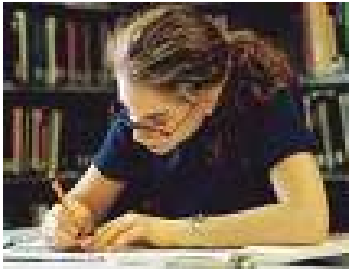
(2) **Research the types of degree programs most employers desire that you have for your chosen career field.** This information can be easily researched online. Some of the best websites include <http://www.bls.gov/oco/> , <https://www.cool.army.mil/overview.htm>, or <http://occupationaloutlookhandbook.com/>. The research possibilities are endless using the Internet. You may also call companies or organizations where you desire to be employed to seek this information. Sometimes this may be the best option because degree/certification requirements in some career fields vary greatly from state to state.

(3) **Choose a college that carries your degree choice and best fits your learning style and schedule.** For some this may be an easy task, if there is a local college that carries your degree plan and if you have a fairly predictable work schedule. You may want to begin by determining which colleges are available on your installation and in the



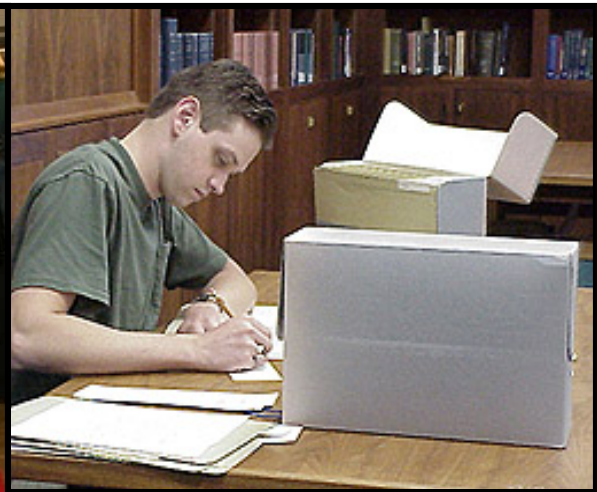
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Four Easy Steps



local traveling area. Remember that if you plan to be in the Army long enough to change duty stations, it is wise to choose a college that is a member of the SOCAD network for easy transfer of college credit, if needed. If you find that your degree is not available locally, you may want to determine if there are distance learning programs that will fulfill your degree requirements. These may be researched online as well. Some good websites include www.degrees.com or www.learning.monster.com. If you choose to attend a college that is not a member of SOCAD, check to be sure that your selected college is nationally or regionally accredited. Army counselors may assist you if you find that you are having difficulty choosing a college or need additional information.

(4.) Ask for a copy of your degree plan from your selected college. Please be sure to provide a copy of your degree program to your Army counselor. Your Army counselor can also help you to choose your first college course, assist you with the Tuition Assistance process through the GoArmyEd portal, and explain how to choose future courses that fit your selected degree plan. Lastly, be sure to choose a career goal and degree plan that are fun and will retain your interest for the normal length of a career. Use your resources wisely. Visit, telephone, email your local education center for assistance or visit the NERO ACES website at www.nereducation.army.mil to request services.



Start Your Degree Today!

By: Susan Ziegler, Education Services Specialist

September is here, and thoughts once again turn to school. In fact, at the Post Exchange the school supplies are dwindling quickly. Time is short! What about you? If you find that you continue to delay your college plans, try to figure out why. Is it lack of money? Are you unsure

about what degree major to pursue? Does your schedule make it difficult for you to attend traditional college classes?

You shouldn't delay pursuing your educational goals because of a lack of money. Every October 1st the Army provides you with \$4,500 for

tuition assistance for the fiscal year. The \$4,500 is a given--no need to buy a lottery ticket. Federal financial aid is another good source for college money, even grants! There are also countless college scholarships! You may not realize it, but you may even use your Montgomery GI Bill while you are active-duty, if that appears to be the best plan for you.

Of course you have work and/or family responsibilities. Every three-semester-hour college class requires about six hours of reading/outside research per week. Manage your time. Schedule one hour per night, after dinner perhaps, or wake up an hour earlier during the work week. Find blocks of time, like early Saturday and Sunday morning so you still have family time. Have a plan and work it.

Why? Well first of all, education increases your chances for advancement in your career and over your lifetime. Over a lifetime, those with college degrees earn twice as much money as those who never earned degrees. In your Army career, you complete various training programs to reach the next career level. You've learned to work with others, problem solve, and "lead by example." You signed a contract with the Army; why not commit to a degree goal too?

Your first step.... Career planning. Remember: career

Research Your Career Options!

What do you need to know about a career possibility?

- ♦ Education level required
- ♦ Courses and degree majors that correspond
- ♦ Qualities and characteristics needed
- ♦ Potential for upward mobility, promotion
- ♦ Advantages and disadvantages (your opinion is what counts!)
- ♦ Starting salary
- ♦ Potential salary increases
- ♦ A typical day on your job

Career Information Websites

<http://www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp>

<http://www.careerkey.org/>

<http://www.myfuture.com/>

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm>

Start Your Degree Today!

By: Susan Ziegler, Education Services Specialist

(Continued)

decision-making is a continuous process. As you analyze your personal interests, skills, and goals you will have a better idea of which careers best suit you. Choose a major that provides the best preparation for the career you want. As you take classes and see more opportunities, your career goal may change. If you are unsure about your career goal, visit your Army Education Center and talk with the Guidance Counselors about career and interest inventories. These are stocked by DANTES and available for military personnel. Ask for a test that matches your interests, preferences and skills to a list of possible careers.

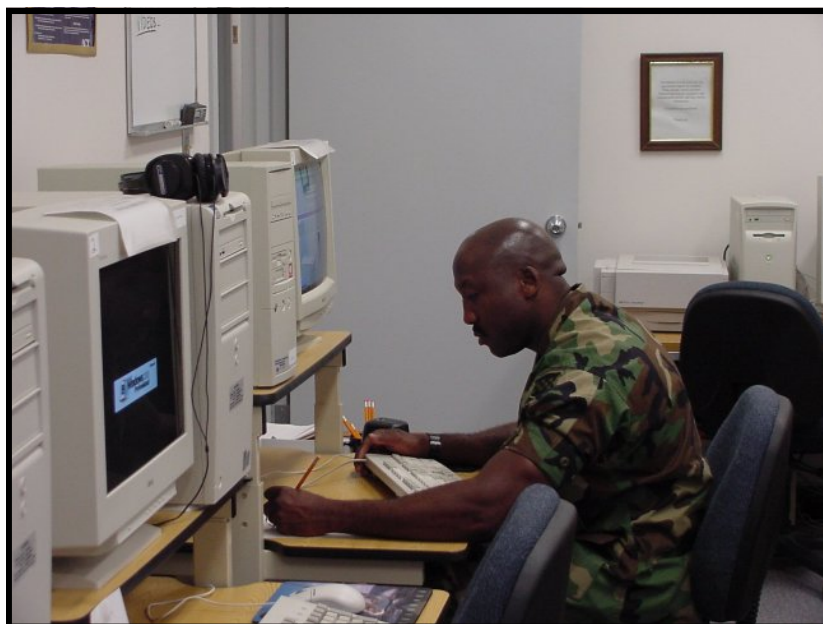
Next, you have your goal. Is it Forensic Psychology? Business? Journalism? Who offers a degree in your chosen area? You will need to do a little research. The best approach will be using the Professional Guides, such as the College Board's Book of Majors or the College Blue Book's Degrees Offered by College and Subject. These books list colleges by State and the degree levels offered – Associate (2 year/60 semester hours), Bachelor (4 year/120 semester hours) or Master Degree Level. The schools listed are accredited. Don't get roped in by online schools that

offer degrees for profit. If you are getting pressure, you are talking with a salesperson—not a counselor. If using government Tuition Assistance or VA funding, regional or national accreditation is required. The accreditation of your school will impact transferability; for example, a regionally accredited school may not allow you to transfer in courses taken from a nationally accredited vocational school.

The College Catalog (hard copy or on line) provides a wealth of information to include a description of classes. Each degree plan/outline lists the specific requirements to graduate. An Associate degree may be your initial goal, and you may plan to next pursue a Bachelor's degree. You must

meet your chosen school's requirements to graduate. Look at the descriptions of the required courses. You may feel that the degree plan at one college corresponds with your interests and future goals better than the courses offered by other colleges. Isn't it wonderful to have Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) degree plans at your finger tips for LOI schools with www.GoArmyEd.com? The LOI schools are committed to working with Army policies and working with Soldiers. The degree plans are in the eArmyU format, which provides a spreadsheet of required classes and choices to complete the requirements—to include credit from tests such as CLEP or DSST, military credit (AARTS), and/or distance learning.

Whatever your degree plan, the first year of college includes General Education





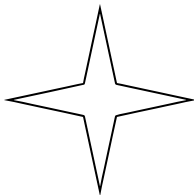
Start Your Degree Today! (continued)

Requirements, composed of English, Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. Think about testing your knowledge of these subjects. Study Guides are available at the Post Libraries and in Book Stores, or check out and read a College Text Book from your Local Library. Always check with your school's advisor for the tests they will accept. If you are disciplined and willing to study the Study Guides or read the book, you will save time by taking tests for college credit, which will ultimately reduce the time it will take for you to complete your degree. Visit your Army Education Center for available tests, operating hours, and testing procedures. No-cost testing is available for military personnel.

At this point, you will be ready to choose your classes and course delivery method. Will you take traditional classroom classes or online courses? Traditional courses require a somewhat predictable schedule so that you know ahead of time that you can attend class all term at the scheduled times. Online courses require a computer, and because web-based courses tend to be flexible, they typically require a good amount of self-discipline. Some schools require that you are online at least once a week or several times. Look at the school's term schedule. Make your choices using the Integrated Course Schedule on the GoArmyEd portal.

One last note: Make sure you complete all the requirements on the GoArmyEd Checklist to include the Common Application which identifies you to the school as a GoArmyEd student. These requirements must be completed before you can enroll in any classes. Classes are listed on the Integrated Course Schedule up to eight weeks prior to the class starting date. Be sure to register no later than two weeks prior to the class start date. Make sure you know the GoArmyEd procedures. Knowledge is power! Once you have completed all the necessary initial requirements prior to your first registration in GoArmyEd, registration will take only a few minutes from your home or work computer! No paper. No faxing. You have access to a world of information on your computer screen. Keep in mind, though, that certain actions such as changing your college or degree plan require the approval of an education counselor.

The bottom line is this: you CAN do it! Start today!





Step-by-Step Instructions for First-Time Users

- ◇ Sign onto the www.GoArmyEd.com portal. Click on the "New Users" tab at the top right corner of the screen. Fill in the information requested; follow all prompts, including the review of eight slides. Click "Submit." You will receive your username and password.
- ◇ Click "Back" and this time type your username and password on the right side of the screen. Complete the Prospective User Checklist displayed on your Prospective Student View (This will take you through everything you need to do to request tuition assistance.)
- ◇ Review college and degree options. Select and print out your choice; review the integrated schedule.
- ◇ Print out the Statement of Understanding; have this signed by your Commander
- ◇ Complete the Soldier Quick Training Slides.
- ◇ See any Army Education Counselor to talk over any questions you may have; he or she will input your signed SOU into the portal and approve your degree plan.
- ◇ Complete the Common Application form and submit. (You will find this under the "Before you Enroll in a Course" heading on your home screen.) Please note: Due to software issues, Soldiers will need to wait 24-48 hours after completing the common application before enrolling in a class.
- ◇ Register for the course through the GoArmyEd portal by reviewing the Integrated Course Schedule found under the "Earn a Degree or Credential" for the class first. After you click on "Class Detail" and know it is the right class for your degree plan, write down the Class Number. Then go back to your home page and click on "Enroll or Drop/Withdraw from a Course." Select "Add a Course" and type in the class number. Follow the few remaining instructions and your registered class will come up on the screen.

"Education: Being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you don't. It's knowing where to go to find out what you need to know and it's knowing how to use the information once you get it." William Feather, author.

DIPLOMA MILLS

Taken from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation website: www.chea.org

In their quest for higher education and training, students and the public in the United States sometimes encounter "diploma mills"—dubious providers of educational offerings or operations that offer certificates and degrees that are considered bogus. They may also encounter "accreditation mills"—dubious providers of accreditation and quality assurance or operations that offer a certification of quality of institutions that is considered bogus.

Diploma mills and accreditation mills mislead and harm. In the U.S., degrees and certificates from mills may not be acknowledged by other institutions when students seek to transfer or go to graduate school. Employers may not acknowledge degrees and certificates from diploma mills when providing tuition assistance for continuing education. "Accreditation" from an accreditation mill can mislead students and the public about the quality of an institution. In the presence of diploma mills and accreditation mills, students may spend a good deal of money and receive neither an education nor a useable credential.

Internationally, diploma mills and accreditation mills are a disservice to the public in several ways. U.S. diploma mills and accreditation mills that have become items for export cast doubt on the reliability of legitimate degrees and accreditation. Students from outside the U.S. can be vulnerable because they have limited information and experience by which to judge whether or not a U.S. operation is a "mill." Governments outside the U.S. seeking to learn about accredited status of U.S. operations can be vulnerable as well. Unsuspecting students and governments of other countries may know only that a provider is "American" and not be aware that it is a mill.

There is no single definition of "diploma mill" or of "accreditation mill" in higher education. While a few states have laws or regulations regarding these operations, most do not. Some agencies of the federal government may scrutinize diploma mills or accreditation mills, but this is quite limited to date. In general, diploma mills would not pass the initial screening of accrediting organizations (review for eligibility, candidacy, or initial accreditation) and thus fall outside the purview of these bodies. Similarly, accreditation mills would struggle with the pre-screening for recognition and thus escape this scrutiny as well. Identifying diploma mills and accreditation mills is not easy. A number of the features of diploma mills are similar to familiar higher education institutions. A number of the features of accreditation mills are similar to well-known accrediting organizations. Nonetheless, prospective students and the public can look for several indicators that suggest an operation may be a diploma mill or an accreditation mill. *It is the presence of a number of these features taken together that should signal to students and the public that they may, indeed, be dealing with a "mill."* (See below.)

Questions to ask in determining whether or not a school is actually a diploma mill:

- Can degrees be purchased?
- Is there a claim of accreditation when there is no evidence of this status?
- Is a questionable accreditation agency referenced?
- Are degrees based solely on experience or resume review? Are few assignments required for students to earn credits?
- Are there few requirements for graduation, other than the required fees?
- Does the operation fail to provide information about a campus, business location, or address (uses a P.O. Box)?
- Does the operation have a name similar to a well-known college or university?
- Does the operation fail to provide a list of its faculty and their qualifications?
- Does the operation make claims in its publications for which there is no evidence?

How Potential Employers Identify False Degrees

(Excerpt from Federal Trade Commission website: www.ftc.gov)



Although it's not always easy to tell if academic credentials are from an accredited institution, the federal officials say there are clues to help you spot questionable credentials on a resume or application. Look for:

Out of Sequence Degrees. When you review education claims, you expect to see degrees earned in a traditional progression — high school, followed by bachelor's, master's, and doctoral or other advanced degrees. If an applicant claims a master's or doctoral degree, but no bachelor's degree — or if the applicant claims a college degree, but no high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) diploma, consider it a red flag, and a likely sign of a diploma mill.

Quickie Degrees. It generally takes time to earn a college or advanced degree — three to four years for an undergraduate degree, one or two years for a master's

degree, and even longer to earn a doctorate. A degree earned in a very short time, or several degrees listed for the same year, are warning signs for the hiring official or the person doing the preliminary screening.

Degrees From Schools in Locations Different From the Applicant's Job or Home. If the applicant worked full-time while attending school, check the locations of the job and the educational institution. If the applicant didn't live where he went to school, check to see if the degree is from an accredited distance learning institution, using the steps described under 'Checking Out Academic Credentials.' If the degree is not from a legitimate, accredited distance learning institution, it may be from a diploma mill.

Sound-Alike Names. Some diploma mills use names that sound or look like those of well-known colleges or universities. If the institution has a name similar to a well-known school, but is located in a different state, check on it. Should you come across a degree from an institution with a prestigious-sounding foreign name, that calls for some homework, too. Researching the legitimacy of foreign schools can be a challenge, but consider it a

warning sign if an applicant claims a degree from a country where she never lived.

Online Resources

U.S. Department of Education:

<http://www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/resources.html>

Overview of Accreditation Agencies:

www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html

List of so-called accreditation agencies that are not recognized or legitimate: <http://www.credentialwatch.org/non/agencies.shtml>

BEST and Most Comprehensive Information on Diploma Mills: Includes many links, articles, and much more! <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/DiplomaMills.htm>

Find degree programs that are fully accredited:

www.degreefinders.com/

www.elearners.com/